

CREATION CARE IN OUR CONGREGATIONS: LIVING LIGHTLY ON GOD'S GOOD EARTH

Submitted to the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, 117th Convention, 2018

Sponsored by: The Diocesan Deputation to the 79th General Convention of the Episcopal Church

Resolved, that the 117th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts reaffirm our commitment to creation care as expressed in the resolution from the 116th Convention entitled “We are Still In: A Resolution to Fight Climate Change” (see Resource A below); and be it further

Resolved, that the 117th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts applaud and actively support Resolution A018, passed by both houses of the 79th General Convention, affirming that “*as individuals and communities of faith, The Episcopal Church set an example, in the spirit of the Paris Climate Accord, by making intentional decisions about living lightly and gently on God’s good earth, for example, through energy conservation, renewable energy, sustainable food practices and gardening; and be it further Resolved, That dioceses, communities of faith and individuals committing to the Paris Climate Accord consider reporting on their commitments, actions and successes to the Executive Council*” (see Resource B below); and be it further

Resolved, that the 117th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts call on all parishes in the Diocese to be faithful stewards of our fragile planet by taking the following concrete steps before the 118th Diocesan Convention:

- 1) Create a Green Team, beginning by naming one or more individuals to serve as liaison with our diocese’s Missioner for Creation Care in order to help the parish strengthen energy conservation and efficiency and encourage public advocacy around environmental issues (see Resource C below);
- 2) Undertake an energy audit for all parish buildings in order to reduce the parish’s carbon footprint, keeping in mind that grants are available from the Diocese to offset half the cost of the audit (see Resource D below);
- 3) Report back to the sponsors of this resolution before the 118th Diocesan Convention on steps taken and progress made on Steps #1 and #2. Congregations should report progress and accomplishments to the following members of the G.C. Deputation:

In the Berkshire Corridor: John Cheek (cheekbass@gmail.com)

In the Valley Corridor: Maggie Sweeney (magsween10@yahoo.com)

In the Worcester Corridor: Mac Murray (mac.murray@gmail.com)

Explanation: The resolution “We are Still In,” passed at our 116th Diocesan Convention, made it clear that climate science is unambiguous: climate change is real and largely caused by human activities. Its effects are manifest in the accelerating severity and frequency of extreme weather events around the world, which disproportionately affect the poor. Almost all scientists agree that we must stabilize the global mean temperature

increase to 2° Celsius to avoid catastrophe by instituting significant reductions in global levels of carbon emissions.

In the year since our 116th Diocesan Convention, the climate situation has only become more dire. This year is on pace to be among the fourth hottest years on record. The other three were 2015, 2016, and 2017. Yet meanwhile our national leaders are systematically gutting the climate protections, regulations, and treaties that sought to ensure a stable climate and habitable world. It is up to individual citizens and grassroots communities to take up the challenge.

The 79th General Convention passed thirteen resolutions on the topic of creation care, urging Episcopalians to take many bold actions to protect our Earth, including planting trees, using carbon offsets for church-related travel, advocating for climate treaties at the U.N., investing in clean and renewable energy, and phasing out the use of bottled water. The idea of submitting a resolution to Diocesan Convention around creation care was inspired by a Joint Session of General Convention at which deputies and bishops were invited to brainstorm ways that we could bring this issue home.

Resources

Resource A: We Are Still In: A Resolution to Fight Climate Change

Submitted to the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, 116th Convention, 2017

Sponsored by: The Social Justice Commission and the Missioner for Creation Care

Resolved, that the 116th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts affirms the leadership of Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church, The Most Reverend Michael Curry, in his June 1, 2017, response to President Trump’s decision to pull out of the 2015 Paris Climate Accord; and be it further

Resolved, that the 116th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts praises the “We Are Still In” declaration, in which hundreds of signatories pledge support of the goals of the Paris Climate Accord; and be it further

Resolved, that the 116th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts joins with the United Church of Christ in living out the principles of the Paris Climate Accord by committing our time, financial resources, and prayers to:

- call on our congregations and every person of faith to set a moral example by making decisions of integrity in our energy choices and holding our leaders accountable to likewise reduce carbon emissions;
- call on our clergy and lay leaders to speak from the pulpit about our moral obligation to protect God’s creation; and
- call on our communities of faith to be bold and courageous in proclaiming the urgency of the climate crisis in the public square and at the local, state, and federal levels.

Explanation: The scientific evidence continues to be overwhelming that climate change is real and caused by humans. Its effects are already manifest in the severity and frequency of extreme weather events around the world, which disproportionately affect the poor. Almost all scientists agree that, in order to avoid catastrophe, we must stabilize the global mean temperature increase to 2° Celsius by instituting significant reductions in global levels of carbon emissions.

In his June 1 statement, The Most Reverend Michael Curry calls on the Episcopal Church to continue to take bold action to address the climate crisis, reminding us that we are all trustees and stewards of God’s good creation.¹ The Diocese of Western Massachusetts has been a leader within the Episcopal Church in its urging Church Pension Fund, the Investment Committee of the Executive Council, and the Episcopal Church Foundation to divest financial resources from fossil fuel companies and to re-invest in carbon-free sources of energy. The diocese passed such a resolution at its 113th Convention, “Eliminating Fossil Fuel Holdings and Investing in Clean Energy.” The Trustees of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts also voted in 2014 to align their investments more closely with their faith and values by reducing their exposure to fossil fuels and to invest in renewable energy projects as objectives for the portfolio going forward.

The Diocese of Western Massachusetts has also taken leadership in the Episcopal Church by creating in 2014 a diocesan-level position, Missioner for Creation Care, a position that has since become ecumenical. Starting in 2014 the diocese began observing an annual Season of Creation (October 4, the Feast of St. Francis, through the end of November), which encourages preaching and prayer, sacrificial acts of generosity, and bold public witness to strengthen our Christian response to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Annually, the Creation Season webpage provides resources to ACT, ADVOCATE, LEARN, and PRAY. These resources include tools for implementing this resolution.

So far, the “We Are Still In”² declaration in support of the Paris Accord has been signed by the mayors of more than 200 American cities, governors of numerous states, leaders of hundreds of American companies, and many university presidents. They pledge to “pursue ambitious climate goals, working together to take forceful action and to ensure that the US remains a global leader in reducing emissions.”

On June 2, 2017, Bishop Doug Fisher of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts, the Rev. Dr. Jim Antal (Conference Minister and President, United Church of Christ in Massachusetts), and the Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas (Missioner for Creation Care, Diocese of Western Massachusetts and Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ) also condemned President Donald Trump's decision to abandon the Paris Climate Accords by signing a statement, “An Opportunity for which the Church Was Born.” This ecumenical statement, which was also passed by the national leadership of the United

¹ Genesis 1:26-31

² www.WeAreStillIn.org

Church of Christ, affirms, “Our Judeo-Christian heritage teaches that the Earth and its web of life are precious in God’s sight, that the Earth belongs not to us but to God, and that we are entrusted with loving the Earth as God loves it.³ As followers of Jesus, we are committed to God’s mission of reconciling people with each other and with the whole of creation.” The statement declared, “[The President’s] decision is scientifically, economically, medically, politically and morally wrong. With heartache we recognize the devastating toll of suffering that will be exacted by this Administration’s refusal to address the climate crisis. We are appalled by the Administration’s unwillingness to join with other nations in protecting and stabilizing the atmosphere upon which our species – and so many other forms of life – depend.” We fully concur.

We must, therefore, in the three-fold challenge of the document, “An Opportunity for Which the Church Was Born,” and of the analogous statement from the United Church of Christ, “accept the mantle of moral leadership,” strive to “incarnate change,” and “proclaim the truth [of climate change] in the public square.” The alternative is devastating to contemplate.

Resource B: A018 Episcopalians Participating in Paris Climate Agreement

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 79th General Convention recognize that there is an important shift toward renewable energy which will help protect God’s good creation. Supporting this shift is part of the Church’s call to being part of The Jesus Movement in the world; and be it further

Resolved, That climate change be recognized as a human-made threat to all God’s people, creatures and the entire created order, while particularly placing unjust and inequitable burdens and stresses on native peoples, those displaced by environmental change, poor communities and people of color; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention adopt the House of Bishops’ 2011 Pastoral Teaching on the Environment commitment as the official position of the church; and be it further

Resolved, That through our ongoing role as observers at the United Nations, we will continue to fully and completely “advocate for a fair, ambitious, and binding climate treaty,” and participate in future meetings of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as an active, faithful and engaged voice for all of God’s good earth; and be it further

Resolved, That as individuals and communities of faith, The Episcopal Church set an example, in the spirit of the Paris Climate Accord, by making intentional decisions about living lightly and gently on God’s good earth, for example, through energy conservation, renewable energy, sustainable food practices and gardening; and be it further

³ Genesis 1-2:3, Psalm 24, and Genesis 2:15

Resolved, That dioceses, communities of faith and individuals committing to the Paris Climate Accord consider reporting on their commitments, actions and successes to the Executive Council.

Resource C: <http://revivingcreation.org/how-to-start-a-green-team-at-your-church/>

Resource D: Energy Audit Grants

The Diocesan Council has approved funding for a program to subsidize the cost of energy audits for your congregation. Grants are now available to pay for half of the cost of an energy audit for any of our churches. If you are interested in having an energy audit done on your buildings, send an email to Canon Steve Abdow (SAbdow@diocesewma.org) or reach him by phone at (413) 737-4786, ext. 121.